

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T USUN NEW YORK 03024

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINS, MOPS, LE, SY
SUBJECT: BEIRUT FIGHTING: DIALOGUE WITH SYRIANS

1. SUMMARY. POLMIN CALLED ON SYRIAN AMB AL-CHOUFI LATE JULY 26 TO EXPRESS CONCERN OVER FIGHTING IN BEIRUT AREA AND MADE POINTS SET FORTH IN DEPT INSTRUCTIONS. AL-CHOUFI AGREED OUTBREAKS MUST BE CONTAINED AND WELCOMED US WILLINGNESS TO WORK WITH SYRIA TO THAT END. HE URGED MORE ACTIVE US INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANESE SITUATION TO FIND LONG-TERM SOLUTION. END SUMMARY.

2. POLMIN PETREE AND MISOFF CALLED ON SYRIAN AMB AL-CHOUFI AT HIS HOME EVENING OF JULY 26 TO MAKE APPROACH PER DEPT INSTRUCTIONS.(DEPTEL NUMBER NOT AVAILABLE AT WRITING.) HE TOOK CAREFUL NOTES WHILE PETREE OUTLINED ALL POINTS IN INSTRUCTIONS AND SAID HE WOULD REPORT PROMPTLY TO DAMASCUS. HE NOTED IN PARTICULAR US DESIRE TO BE HELPFUL AND FACT WE HAVE BEEN IN TOUCH WITH
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VARIOUS PARTIES INVOLVED. HE AGREED MORE EFFORT WAS NEEDED TO CONTAIN SITUATION AND PREVENT FURTHER OUTBREAKS OF FIGHTING.

3. DURING COURSE OF RATHER LENGTHY EXPOSITION OF VIEWS WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS PERSONAL BUT ALSO SAID WERE WHAT "EVERYBODY REALIZES", AL-CHOUFI URGED MORE ACTIVE US

INVOLVEMENT IN "LEBANESE TRAGEDY." HE SAID SYRIA COULD NOT RESOLVE SITUATION ALONE. MARONITES, HE SAID, NEEDED TO FEEL SECURE AND NEITHER SYRIAN PRESENCE NOR FRENCH OR SAUDI ASSURANCES COULD PROVIDE THIS. IT COULD COME ONLY THROUGH US ASSURANCES. ISRAEL COULD NOT RESIST FISHING IN TROUBLED WATERS AND ITS STRONG LINK WITH MARONITES WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR MUCH OF DIFFICULTY.

4. AL-CHOUFFI SAID THAT SYRIA COULD NOT STAY TOO LONG IN LEBANON, THAT THIS COULD LEAD TO UNITING OF LEBANESE AGAINST SYRIA. HOWEVER, MARONITES WERE ASKING IMPOSSIBLE WHEN THEY INSISTED SYRIA SHOULD WITHDRAW IMMEDIATELY. US SHOULD MAKE CLEAR IT WOULD NOT AGREE TO SYRIAN HUMILIATION BUT ACCOMPANY THIS WITH ASSURANCES AT HIGHEST LEVEL THAT WE WILL NOT SUPPORT ELIMINATION OF MARONITE SPECIAL POLITICAL POSITION IN LEBANON UNLESS LEBANESE PEOPLE DEMOCRATICALLY DECIDE TO CHANGE SYSTEM. MARONITES ALSO NEEDED ASSURANCES THAT SYRIA HAS NO INTEREST IN REMAINING INDEFINITELY IN LEBANON. IN URGING IMPORTANCE OF US ROLE AL-CHOUFFI DECLARED THAT "THE US IS THE ONLY CREDIBLE PARTY IN THE MIDDLE EAST."

5. PETREE RESPONDED BY POINTING OUT THAT US HAS BEEN VERY ACTIVE POLITICALLY IN CONNECTION WITH LEBANESE SITUATION, BEING IN CONSTANT CONTACT WITH VARIOUS FACTIONS IN LEBANON, VIRTUALLY DAILY CONTACT WITH
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ISRAELIS, AND IN CLOSE TOUCH WITH SYRIAN GOVT AS WELL. HE WONDERED WHAT MORE AL-CHOUFFI THOUGHT WE COULD DO. THE AMBASSADOR REPLIED WITH FURTHER EMPHASIS ON NEED FOR "FORCEFUL" USE OF US POSITION WITH PARTIES. HE EXPRESSED CHAGRIN THAT IT HAS NOT BEEN POSSIBLE TO REBUILD LEBANESE ARMY MORE RAPIDLY. IN CONCLUDING HE SAID HE RECEIVED OUR MESSAGE WITH GRATITUDE AND SYRIA WAS GLAD TO HAVE US INVOLVED AS LONG AS WE WERE IMPARTIAL, WHICH HE BELIEVED WE HAD BEEN SO FAR. PETREE ASSURED HIM WE WOULD CONTINUE TO ACT IMPARTIALLY AND EMPHASIZED AGAIN THAT WE CONSIDERED IT IMPERATIVE THAT SOME FORMULA BE FOUND TO FORESTALL RECURRENT FIGHTING AND WE WORK TOGETHER IN FINDING A WAY FOR PEACE TO BE REESTABLISHED IN LEBANON. YOUNG

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